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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0508
INFO RUEHHS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 0738
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 0557
RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0005

C O N F I D E N T I A L CHIANG MAI 000116

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/26/2017

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [SOCI](#) [OEXC](#) [TH](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: CHIANG MAI SERVES AS BASE FOR CHINA-FOCUSED CHRISTIAN GROUP

REF: A. A) BEIJING 4237 - AMERICANS EXPELLED FROM XINJIANG FOR RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

1B. B) (05) CHIANG MAI 106 - CHIANG MAI EXPANDS AS HUB FOR CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY WORK IN ASIA

CLASSIFIED BY: Bea Camp, Consul General, Consulate Chiang Mai,
Dept of State.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

11. (C) Summary. Chiang Mai's large foreign Christian community provides a safe base for religious groups engaged in quiet work elsewhere in the region. While most do not identify their activities to the Consulate, our presence and American citizen services contribute to Chiang Mai's appeal for these organizations. End summary.

12. (U) Northern Thailand, with an American missionary presence dating from 1867, has served as a fall-back zone for religious groups forced out of China, Tibet, and Burma for over half a century. More recently, Chiang Mai has attracted organizations such as the Christian Conference of Asia, which moved from Hong Kong in 2005 (ref b), as well as those seeking temporary haven, such as Pakistan's Murree Christian School in 2003.

13. (C) A look at one of these groups, Friends of China (FOC), shows a route by which religiously motivated individuals find their way into China as English teachers and "qualified professionals in various fields". The foundation, which moved its regional office to Chiang Mai in 1997 after a decade in Hong Kong, lists Chengdu as the main China location, with rep offices in Xining, Xian and Urumqi. FOC currently has about 150 "associates" working in 7 provinces and municipalities in China. An estimated 40 percent of these associates are US citizens.

14. (C) The FOC website includes no reference to religion, referring instead to "support for education". In contrast, a brochure available at the Thailand office defines FOC as "a charitable foundation that seeks to place, equip and support Christian professionals serving primarily in western and central China." The Chiang Mai office director, a Norwegian who worked in China for Ericsson as part of the program, says that FOC associates do not hide their religion but are advised on the prevailing cultural boundaries of their various locations.

15. (SBU) A visit to the back-street Chiang Mai office of FOC included a tour by an American teacher who was helping staff the office while on leave from Zhengzhou during the last trimester of his wife's pregnancy. Chiang Mai's medical facilities, low cost of living, church community and access to Consular Reports of Birth Abroad contribute to this kind of arrangement.

16. (C) Applications for FOC jobs pass through the Chiang Mai office, where they are cleansed of references to religious affiliation before being sent on to Chengdu for processing. Most associates enter China through Chiang Mai, where they receive a short orientation and apply at the Chinese Consulate for visas. The receiving work units in China arrange longer-term visas for those under their responsibility.

17. (C) In response to questions about visas and other procedures, the head of the Chiang Mai office repeatedly referred to Chinese "flexibility", noting that flexibility increases with distance from Beijing. He rated Qinghai as "the most flexible" province, acknowledging that Xinjiang is

particularly sensitive. Although no FOC associates have been expelled from the country in the organization's 20 year history, several have not have their visas renewed, including recently a Swedish couple in Xinjiang.

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